Chapter 2: Sparks in the Classroom

Snow still clung to the window ledges of the east wing of the university, though the late-morning sun tried its best to coax the city into thaw. Anastasia hurried across the courtyard, her boots crunching over patches of old ice as she tightened her grip on her satchel. The quiet of early morning had dissolved into a hum of voices, footsteps, and swirling cold air that carried with it the scent of roasted chestnuts from a street vendor just outside the gate.

She paused before entering the humanities building, brushing snowflakes from her sleeves. Students streamed past her in clusters, their conversations rising and falling like a tide. Some argued politics, others joked about professors, and one young couple clung to each other as though the cold were an excuse to stay intertwined.

Anastasia smiled faintly before pushing open the heavy wooden door. The corridor greeted her with warmth and the faint, comforting musk of old books and overheated radiators. She loved this place—the creak of the floorboards, the faded murals of philosophers lining the walls, and the way every classroom felt like a small stage where ideas could spark into revolutions.

Her classroom was already buzzing when she stepped inside. Tall windows filled the room with soft light, but the real center of gravity was Professor Morozova, pacing before the chalkboard with the intensity of someone preparing to ignite fireworks.

“Good morning,” she boomed, though her back was turned as she scrawled a line across the board.

Anastasia slipped into her seat beside her friend Polina, who leaned over with a conspiratorial whisper.

“You’re late. Again.”

Anastasia laughed quietly. “By thirty seconds.”

“Thirty seconds in Morozova-time is an eternity.”

Before Anastasia could reply, Morozova spun around.

“History,” she began, “is not written by victors. Nor is it written by the oppressed. It is written by those who dare to observe.”

She tapped the chalk against the board for emphasis. “Observation. Awareness. These are the true engines of change.”

Artyom raised his hand from the back row. “But awareness doesn’t change the world. Action does.”

Morozova’s eyes glittered with approval. “Correct. But action without awareness is chaos. Destruction. Revolution without purpose is simply fire.”

Polina leaned closer. “She always talks like she’s predicting the end of the world.”

“Or the beginning,” Anastasia murmured.

Morozova's gaze swept the room—and lingered on Anastasia. "Miss Volkova, what do you think drives people to change? Pain? Hope? Necessity?"

The room quieted. Anastasia straightened, feeling the weight of dozens of eyes.

"I think," she said softly, "that people change when they finally see that another way is possible. When possibility becomes… undeniable."

Morozova smiled—a rare, genuine smile. "Excellent. Mark my words, class: possibility is the spark from which new worlds are born."

A ripple of whispers followed. Polina nudged Anastasia with her elbow. "Look at you, philosopher of the morning."

Anastasia laughed, but inside something glowed—warm and alive.

After class, the corridors filled with students drifting toward the café on the corner. Polina tugged Anastasia along.

"You're coming with me. I need caffeine before my next lecture or I'll die."

"You won't die," Anastasia said, chuckling. "But all right."

They stepped into the café—a narrow, cozy place with steamed-up windows and velvet cushions sagging from decades of use. The air smelled of coffee, baked bread, and cinnamon. A radio in the corner played an old folk song.

They ordered two cappuccinos and found a small table by the window. Outside, snow fluttered lazily to the ground as people hurried past, bundled in scarves and heavy coats.

"So," Polina said, blowing on her drink, "you're going to tell me. What's going on with you lately? You're… different."

Anastasia hesitated. "Different how?"

"Different like…" Polina waved her hand vaguely. "Like you're thinking of something big. Bigger than school. Bigger than all of this."

Anastasia looked into her coffee, watching the foam swirl. "I don't know. I just—feel like the world is full of threads. And I'm starting to see how they connect. Like everything is on the edge of becoming something else."

Polina raised an eyebrow. "Wow. Okay. So you're becoming a mystic now."

"No," Anastasia said with a laugh. "Just observant."

Before Polina could tease her further, her phone buzzed with a new message. She glanced at it and groaned. “Ugh. I have to run. My advisor moved our meeting earlier.”

She stood, squeezing Anastasia’s shoulder. “Don’t think too hard today. It’s bad for your health.”

Anastasia watched her leave, smiling softly. Then she turned back to the window.

And for a moment, the world outside seemed to shimmer—not visibly, but in the way a dream lingers at the edge of consciousness. Something was coming. She didn’t know what. But she felt it as surely as she felt the warmth of the coffee in her hands.

A possibility.

A spark.

Waiting to ignite.